

## 218 THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

"Ah! what a cynic *you* are!" cried the old lady, pushing back her chair, and nodding to Lady Ruxton. "You must come and dine with me soon again. You are really an admirable tonic, much better than what Sir Andrew prescribes for me. You must tell me what people you would like to meet, to be a delightful gathering." "I like men who have a future, and women who have a past," he answered. "Or do you think that would make it a petticoat party?" "I fear so," she said, laughing, as she stood up. "A thousand pardons., my dear Lady Ruxton," she added. "I didn't see you hadn't finished your cigarette." "Never mind, Lady Narborough. I smoke a great deal too much. I am going to limit myself, for the future." "Pray don't, Lady Ruxton," said Lord Henry. "Moderation is a fatal thing. Enough is as bad as a meal. More than enough is as good as a feast." Lady Ruxton glanced at him curiously. "You must come and explain that to me some afternoon, Lord Henry. It sounds a fascinating theory," she murmured, as she swept out of the room. "Now, mind you don't stay too long over your politics and scandal!" cried Lady Narborough from the door. "If you do, we are sure to squabble upstairs." The men laughed, and Mr. Chapman got up solemnly from the foot of the table and came up to the top. Dorian Gray changed his seat, and went and sat by Lord Henry. Mr. Chapman began to talk in a loud voice about the situation in the House of Commons. He guffawed at his adversaries. The word *doctrinaire*—word full of terror to the British mind—reappeared from time to time between his explosions. An alliterative prefix served as an ornament of oratory. He hoisted the Union Jack on the pinnacles of Thought. The inherited stupidity of the race—sound English common sense—he jovially termed it—was shown to be the proper bulwark for Society. A smile curved Lord Henry's lips and he turned round and looked at Dorian. "Are you better, my dear fellow?" he asked. "You seemed rather out of sorts at dinner." "I am quite well, Harry. I am tired." "That is all." "You were charming last night. The little Duchess is quite devoted to you. She tells me she is going down to Selby." "She has promised to come on the twentieth."